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SUBJECT: POPULAR PRC FILM REDRAWS TAIWAN PROPAGANDA

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The blockbuster film "The Founding of a Republic," released in China to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic of China, marks a noteworthy shift in Chinese propaganda on Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang. While the storyline of the movie is consistent with official PRC historical accounts of the civil war, glorifying Mao Zedong's leadership and the Communist Party's (CCP) defeat of the Japanese and unification of the country, the movie features an unprecedentedly positive depiction of Chiang Kai-shek, characterizing him as well-intentioned but misled by others. It also emphasizes Mao's consultation with other political parties through the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC) before making key decisions. The film appears to be an effort to recast the image of the CCP as a party with a long history of openness to consultation with other political parties and, by extension, perhaps one that could accommodate Taiwan's political parties. While reviewers and bloggers have not commented on the shift in depiction, the film's attendance records guarantees a broad audience for the new view of the KMT. End Summary

Sympathy for Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT  
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¶2. (SBU) Released with much public fanfare as part of the October 1 commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, "The Founding of a Republic," is a docudrama providing the PRC's version of the Chinese civil war from 1945-49, which included appearances by 176 Chinese mainland and Hong Kong celebrities and set new mainland box office records. Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek are the lead characters in the film and the contrast of their personalities is a major focus of the film. Chiang is depicted as authoritative, well dressed, wealthy and in frequent disagreement with other top leaders of the Kuomintang Party (KMT). Mao is portrayed as "democratic," living and dressing simply and held in high esteem by other leaders of the Communist Party. Despite these characterizations, the film includes an almost sympathetic tone toward Chiang, portraying him as well-intentioned and patriotic, but misled and deceived by others with suspect motives. This is a marked contrast to decades-old conventions on the depiction of Chiang in the PRC film and television. In the past, PRC films have generally characterized Chiang as a heartless villain.

¶3. (SBU) The film's portrayal of historic incidents involving the KMT is also much more positive than in past PRC productions. It touches only briefly on scenes of KMT crackdowns on dissidents and the bombing of CCP safe havens, and the depictions are far less violent than those normally seen in PRC films. Most striking is a final scene in the movie, just prior to Chiang's retreat to Taiwan, in which he tells his son that he does not want to be the person blamed by history as splitting the country and orders his subordinate to abort a final offensive against the CCP.

Let's Forget the Past  
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¶3. (SBU) Interwoven throughout the film is another important element

that is far more prominent than in other PRC versions of this period of history. Time and again during the film's storyline, Mao Zedong is depicted as refusing to make key decisions without first consulting eminent figures from outside the CCP and urging them to join the first Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC,) the non-CCP political advisory body. In a particularly noteworthy scene, just as the civil war nears its end, Mao is depicted as extending a personal invitation to KMT Central Supervisory Committee member Li Jishen to join the CPPCC. When Li mentions to Mao that he himself is responsible for the death of many communist cadres, Mao replies "let's forget the past and start a new future."

#### Recasting History with Taiwan in Mind

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¶4. (SBU) "The Founding of a Republic" encapsulates two significant and unprecedented themes which appear to be directed at both Mainland and Taiwan audiences. The first conceit is that Chiang and the KMT were, at heart, patriotic and supportive of China's national unity. Second, the film maintains that the CCP is and always has been open to participation by other political parties, including the KMT, in government. The significance of the film's depiction of the CPPCC as playing a major role in helping shape Mao's views and CCP policies is likely a message to Taiwan viewers. The PRC often emphasizes the nominally inclusive role of the CPPCC in reaching out to political leaders in Taiwan and Hong Kong and playing a prominent role in bridging cross-Straits differences. Taiwan businesspersons doing business in China are often invited to participate as official or unofficial members in the local level CPPCC bodies. The film codifies this theme by recasting the history of the CCP as a party with a long tradition of relying on the CPPCC to play a significant

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role in formulating policy.

Comment

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¶5. (SBU) Chinese reviewers and bloggers have not commented on the new depiction of Chiang, focusing their attention instead a debate over the large number of Chinese actors who have naturalized as citizens of other countries among the cast and the appropriateness of casting such "foreign actors" in a "patriotic film." Nonetheless, the film has set box office records in China, guaranteeing a huge audience receives this revised version of Chinese history.